



The Bee - The Sacramento Bee

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Sacramento aims to reclaim part of its riverfront

In their bid to transform the 'docks,' officials choose a team of developers affiliated with San Francisco's Treasure Island and Ferry Building projects

By Mary Lynne Vellinga -- Bee Staff Writer

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The riverfront south of Old Sacramento's tourist district is quiet and largely forgotten, except for the bikers and joggers who brave a soaring freeway overpass, oil storage tanks and a city sewage reservoir en route to Discovery Park.

Now the city of Sacramento is seeking to reclaim this 43-acre stretch of the Sacramento River - called the "docks" - as a new neighborhood that could have more than 1,000 units of tightly packed high-rise and midrise housing.

The city recently picked the same group that is redeveloping San Francisco's Treasure Island to carry out this transformation.

As part of the project, the city is planning a broad pedestrian promenade that would hug the riverfront all the way from Old Sacramento to Miller Park, an underused park and marina at the end of Broadway.

"We're really trying to gain access to our riverfront and enhance public enjoyment of it," said Sacramento economic development director Wendy Saunders.

If the effort succeeds, it would give new identity to a section of the riverfront that has languished since its heyday in the Gold Rush, when ships moored at docks along the shoreline and unloaded goods that were then sent by rail up the R Street industrial corridor.

Highways eventually superseded the river as a mover of industrial goods, and the construction of Interstate 5 cut the Sacramento River off from downtown. The rail bridge that once carried goods to R Street is being converted into a pedestrian and bike crossway.

In January, the City Council voted to negotiate with KSWM Docks Partners of San Francisco to refine a plan for the site, a nearly teardrop-shaped piece of land that stretches south to Miller Park and is bounded by the river on the west and the freeway on the east.

The blueprint that emerges from this process will have to go back to the council for final approval.

One reason the city chose KSWM from among eight competing teams was because it included the developers who renovated the San Francisco Ferry Building into a much-admired culinary marketplace of Bay Area restaurants and food vendors.

"Of course, we're all terribly impressed with the Ferry Building, but we were also really impressed that even their funding partner was very committed to quality and talked about instances where they had been willing

to sacrifice (financial) returns for quality," Saunders said.

"And they're doing Treasure Island, so they've obviously had some experience with environmentally challenged sites."

Jay Wallace, a partner in Kenwood Investments, the "K" in KSWM Docks Partners, called both Treasure Island and the docks area "great waterfront sites that deserve great attention."

Kenwood is manager of the 400-acre Treasure Island redevelopment area.

The city's drive to redevelop the docks area is part of a larger effort by both West Sacramento and Sacramento to rejuvenate both sides of the river - an effort that has produced big plans but little in the way of actual construction to date.

The docks isn't the only neglected, challenging site on the Sacramento side of the river.

City leaders have long hoped to see an extension of downtown into the former Southern Pacific railyard.

A group backed by Georgia developer Stanley Thomas is proposing to build a neighborhood of 20,000 people on the 240-acre railyard property.

Negotiations to buy the heavily contaminated railyard from Union Pacific have dragged on for three years, but some of those involved with the docks said it has the potential to develop faster.

For one thing, it is much smaller, and only one piece of it - a former Pacific Gas and Electric power plant - has a problem with toxic contamination.

The PG&E site can't be used for housing, so the city is considering moving its Pioneer Reservoir, an enclosed sewage storage tank, to the property and covering it with a park.

The Towe Auto Museum would likely be moved to another site, said city staff members. The animal shelter probably could stay in the new neighborhood.

Saunders said the city would focus first on developing the 23 acres north of the Pioneer Bridge.

The southern portion, which stretches from the freeway overpass to Miller Park, is dotted with oil storage tanks and held mostly by private owners.

As the docks effort moves forward, the longtime private owners of another large piece of industrial property adjacent to Miller Park - the end of the docks area - are also pursuing possible housing and retail development.

The Setzer family, which has operated its forest products company at the foot of Broadway since 1927, is weighing proposals from developers that responded to a solicitation for ideas for its 31 acres.

"We know the city is doing exciting things, and we think it's a real opportunity," said Mark Kable, the company's chief executive officer.

About the writer:

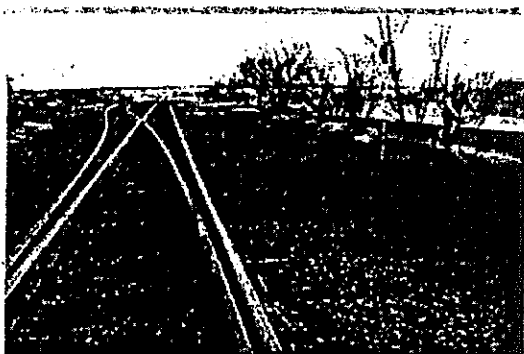
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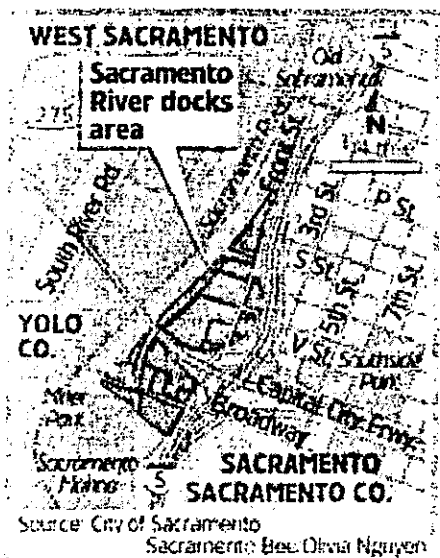
The view from the Embassy Suites Hotel at Capitol Mall, looking south toward Miller Park.

Sacramento Bee/Randy Pench



Railroad tracks like these near Miller Park once were the main way to get goods from the Sacramento River into the city until freeways became a more common route. The city is looking to revive the area, which is cut off from downtown by Interstate 5.

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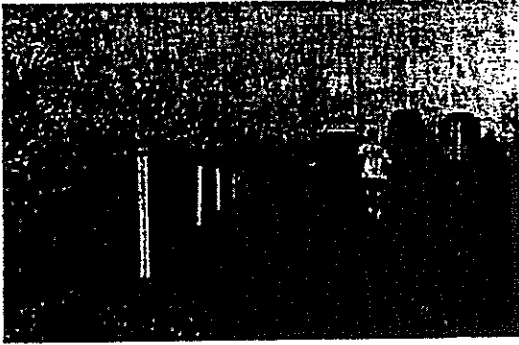
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A jogger heads north along the bike trail between Miller Park and Old Sacramento. City leaders say it's time to bring this section of the riverfront - largely forgotten since its heyday in the Gold Rush - back to life with housing and other construction.